ECA – CEA

Economic Commission for Africa
Commission économique pour l'Afrique

Sixth African Regional Conference On Women
Mid-Term Review of the Implementation of the Dakar and Beijing Platforms For Action

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Report of the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) on The Progress made in the Implementation of the Dakar And Beijing Platforms For Action

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I.   INTRODUCTION

In the last five years, the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) through its African Centre for Women (ACW) initiated a number of activities within the framework of the implementation of the Dakar and Beijing Platforms for Action. In so doing, it operated within the mandate it was given by the member States at the Fifth African Regional Conference on Women in November 1994 "to initiate and implement measures in support of the African Platform for Action and generally monitor its implementation". This call was repeated in the Declaration of the Dakar African Platform for Action on Women which was passed by the African Heads of State and Governments of the organization of African Unity (OAU) in June 1995. Similarly, the member States who adopted the Beijing Platform for Action in September 1995 requested the Regional Commissions "to ensure the implementation and monitoring of both the Platform for Action and the regional platforms and plans of action ...within their mandates, collaborate with other regional intergovernmental organizations, non-governmental organizations, financial and research institutions and the private sector".

Within this framework, ECA initiatives were centred around 4 main areas: monitoring and technical support to member States on the implementation of the Platforms for Action; promoting understanding and securing commitment among policy-makers to make fundamental changes for the empowerment of women in their countries; preparing the sixth African Regional Conference on Women; and defining ECA's vision and strategy for women's empowerment up to year 2004. The specific activities in the 4 areas are discussed briefly below.

II.   MONITORING AND TECHNICAL SUPPORT TO MEMBER STATES

In adopting the Platforms for Action, the Member States also adopted the recommendation to formulate a systematic implementation plan with a time frame, responsibilities clearly delineated and a budget allocated for implementation purposes. In this regard, ECA set out to follow-up the implementation process in the countries by organizing subregional meetings to which it invited a cross-section of the actors including policy makers to discuss what was happening at the national level. The meetings also provided an opportunity to offer technical assistance in relation to the implementation of the Platforms for Action to the participants who included government ministers in charge of women affairs and their experts, representatives of national coordinating NGOs, representatives of subregional IGOs, members of parliament and representatives of UN agencies, particularly from the countries that hosted the meetings.

The subregional meetings were organized between November 1997 and February 1999 for all the five subregional of Africa. While several countries had already formulated their National Action Plans at the time the meetings were held, a significant number were still in the formulation stage or had not yet had them approved by the government at the highest level. ECA thus provided a **Suggested Outline for a National Action Plan** which included defined priorities, specific measurable objectives, activities to meet the objectives, identified actors, division of responsibilities, resources allocated, a time-frame, a monitoring process and an

identified body to monitor the implementation process. The Outline was reviewed and adapted to the needs of individual countries during workshop discussions.

Monitoring, appraisal and evaluation of the implementation of the National Plans of Action were given special attention in the subregional meetings. A **Tool for monitoring the implementation of the National Plans of Action** was suggested and largely discussed in workshops.

Preparations for the mid-decade review of the implementation of the Platforms for Action were also addressed at the subregional meetings. Information was disseminated regarding the process and methodology of the review. It was clarified that each country was to prepare national progress reports on the implementation and in this regard, **Guidelines for writing the National Progress Report** were distributed and discussed. As the link between the member States and the global preparatory process for the Beijing +5 Review meeting, the expectations of the Division for the Advancement of Women in New York were discussed and clarified. Attempts were also made to harmonize New York requirements with those of ECA including the deadline for submission of the Reports. Eventually, only one Report was required for both ECA and New York.

One of the most useful outcomes of the subregional meetings was the clarification of the needs of the Member States. The need for training in gender analysis, gender planning and integration, monitoring and evaluation, collection of gender-disaggregated data and resource mobilization were among the needs repeated the most. The ACW Work Programme for 2000-2001 reflects these needs.

III. International Conference on the occasion of the 40th Anniversary of ECA: *African Women and Economic Development*

It is a fact that investing in women is central to sustainable development. In this context, ECA decided to organize a four-day international conference on the occasion of its 40th anniversary in order to promote a stronger role for African women and contribute towards the achievement of long-term change in their conditions. The conference had 4 main objectives:

- To share experiences on how public policies should equalize opportunities between women and men and redirect resources to those investments in which women's participation brings about the highest social returns

- Draw strategic lessons from relevant ongoing women's programmes for implementing the Beijing Platform for Action

- Identify best practices and validate programme modalities for country-level implementation of actions recommended by the Conference

- Forge partnerships for post-conference implementation of the recommended actions and programmes

The conference considered different strategic components for economic development including governance, information and involvement of the youth.

The meeting brought together African policy-makers from a variety of sectoral ministries including those responsible for women affairs. Representatives of women's groups, religious organizations, grassroot associations, youth, the private sector, intergovernmental bodies at subregional, regional and international levels, bilateral and multilateral bodies and the international community were also invited. The organization modalities of the conference facilitated dialogue among participants whereby views of all categories of the participants were aired freely in different fora.

Several commitment were made at the conference. The most important ones include:

- The establishment of the African Women Committee on Peace and Development which was announced by OAU's Secretary General, Dr Salim Salim along with $ 200,000 financial contribution by OAU and CIDA

- The establishment of a Fund for African Women's Development that was announced by a group of NGOs and individuals. By the end of the conference, a total of $115,000 was pledged and to date, about $30,000 has been actually contributed.

- Representatives of institutions and organizations present agreed to extend their partnerships with the governments in :

    - expanding gender-sensitive reviews to include public expenditure
    - introducing national accounting systems that value women's work
    - including a gender-perspective in information and communication technologies (ICTs)
    - supporting the establishment of telecentres for rural women
    - supporting women's peace initiatives

Perhaps the most important outcome of the conference was the opportunity to reinforce the understanding that integrating gender issues into all the sectors would be the only way to guarantee sustainable democratic development for the benefit of all.

Follow-up meetings and other actions were organized to disseminate the outcome of the Conference and to start the implementation process of some of the recommendations. Undoubtedly, the outcome also greatly influenced the ACW Work Programme for the next biennium.

IV. PREPARATION OF THE SIXTH AFRICAN REGIONAL CONFERENCE ON WOMEN

(a) Renewal of the Committee on Women and Development

The Sixth African Regional Conference on Women is organized under the leadership of the Committee on Women and Development (CWD), a subsidiary statutory organ of the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA).The African Centre for Women is the secretariat of CWD as well as this Conference and in this capacity, it has undertaken a number of activities to strengthen the Committee and to prepare this Conference.

The Committee on Women and Development had originally been set up as the Africa Regional Coordinating Committee for the Integration of Women and Development (ARCC) in 1975 when the first global conference on women was held in Mexico. Its main role was to assist

and advise ECA on issues and strategies related to the integration of women in development, to ensure that policy recommendations were implemented, mobilize resources required for the purpose, follow-up and evaluate subregional activities and organize the Africa Regional Conferences on Women. In 1997, the ECA Conference of

Ministers upon recommendation of the secretariat decided to take measures to revitalize the Committee within the context of ECA's new strategic directions. In this regard, besides changing the name of the Committee from ARCC to CWD, its terms of reference were reformulated to render the Committee more effective.

The other fundamental change with regard to the Committee was the decision to expand its membership to include a cross-section of actors in order to reflect the change in approach to the issue of the advancement of women from women-in-development to the gender approach. The newly expanded membership would therefore include members from a number of sectors in addition to the national machineries responsible for the advancement of women. It would also include representatives from government ministries, civil society organizations, specialized organizations and institutions, subregional and regional intergovernmental organizations and resource persons. As always, the selection process would take into consideration geographical representation besides the category and the number.

The Committee on Women and Development met as a renewed structure for the first time in April 1999 in Ouagadougou. During that meeting, the Committee took a number of decisions to further streamline the functioning and the composition of CWD including the renewal of the government membership during the Sixth Regional Conference on Women.

The newly strengthened CWD also used the occasion to present to the President of Burkina Faso in his capacity as the Chairman of OAU at the time recommendations for speeding up the implementation of the Dakar and Beijing Platforms for Action. This was done through a policy dialogue conducted at his residence. The recommendations covered a wide range of issues including :

- The enhancement of the status and improvement of the human and financial capacity of those departments in charge of the advancement of women

- The application of the UN quota system for the effective participation of women within State institutions and elected offices

- The appointment of women to policy-making positions within OAU General -Secretariat using the same quota system

- Gender training of national leaders to enable them to pursue a gender approach in policy-making, programming and project implementation

- The establishment of the post of a Presidential Adviser on gender and development in every country

- The systematic inclusion of women on country delegations attending meetings of OAU policy organs

- The effective participation of other line ministers in meetings of bodies on the advancement of women

These recommendations were also presented at the OAU Summit held in Algiers, Algeria in July 1999 by the Chairperson of CWD.

(b)   Innovation of the format of the Sixth African Regional Conference on Women

As stated earlier, this Conference is a statutory intergovernmental conference that holds every five years under the leadership of the Committee on Women and Development.

The Technical Preparatory Committee with the full collaboration of ECA decided to adopt an organization modality for the Conference that is a departure from the norm in several ways. First and foremost, the composition of the delegations was designed to be **inclusive and participatory.** Thus, at the government level, while representatives of national machineries in charge of the advancement of women were invited, invitations were also extended to representatives of at least 4 additional sectors in government ministries. A cross-section of NGOs representing not only women NGOs but also other NGO, media and youth representatives that are involved in the implementation of the different thematic areas of the Platforms were also invited as full participants. This is **a first in a statutory intergovernmental meeting.** Delegates therefore comprise institutions from grassroot to regional levels and all are expected to take part fully and equally. Besides, selection of delegations at the national level was left to the discretion of the countries on the basis of guidelines provided by ECA. Still in the spirit of being inclusive, countries were urged to include male participants in their delegations (at least a third). While it may have been too early for most countries to reflect this recommendation in the composition of their delegations, it is strongly hoped that this will be the trend in future.

The participation modalities also seeks to enhance the quality of technical participation by having delegates from a cross-section of disciplines and/or sectors all of which need to be engendered for the benefit of both women and men.

As this innovation in the organizational modality becomes the norm in future such that the preparatory process at the national and subregional levels ensures that the issues and priorities of concern are defined by all players the regional conferences should become smaller and representational, focusing on the main objective of consolidating Africa's common position on future policies and strategies.

V.   ECA's VISION AND STRATEGY FOR 2000-2004

Building capacity for gender mainstreaming

The mandate of the Economic Commission for Africa is to promote the economic and social development in Africa. In so doing, the core message that underlies its development agenda is that Africa's development prospects and the advancement of women are inseparable: women's economic and social advancement is one of the central preconditions for sustainable economic and social development of Africa. Since the period starting in 1995 when ECA's new leadership came into effect and after the adoption of the Dakar and Beijing Platforms for Action, gender perspectives have become a subject of focus in the structural and programme reforms that have been carried out. In this regard, ECA has adopted gender equality as a development goal and gender mainstreaming as a strategy to achieve it in its work both within ECA and at the level of Member States.

Within ECA, the implementation of the goal of achieving gender equality started with the promotion of gender parity at the decision-making level when 40% of the managerial positions were filled by women between 1997 and 1998. This includes the second highest position of the Deputy Executive Secretary. At the level of programmes, gender was defined as a cross-cutting issue that should be integrated in all the substantive work of ECA. It therefore became a requirement to integrate gender concerns in all the substantive sectors of ECA's work and to become one of the indicators of successful programmes. It is also a requirement that in filling vacancies in ECA (with the exception of ACW) at least one woman must be among the candidates on the short-list.

Implied in this policy decision was the existence of skills to successfully identify and integrate gender issues into the work programme. To ensure that this was not left to chance, a gender sensitization and training programme was initiated by ACW in 1998 whereby all the senior management and the staff of the cabinet of the Executive Secretary, ACW and all the Gender Focal Points in the Divisions and the Subregional Development Centres underwent orientation and sensitization training.

Within the horizon 2000-2004, ACW will implement a training programme whereby it will build the capacity of ECA Divisions to mainstream gender in their programmes by using tools and gender indicators to formulate, monitor and evaluate their work programme.

At the level of Member States, it is similarly important to ensure that the skills for mainstreaming gender, the recommended strategy for implementing the Platforms for Action, are not left to chance in all the development sectors at policy, planning, programming and implementation levels. ACW therefore intends to systematically provide member States with tools and information for gender analysis and planning on all the 12 critical areas of concern. Training programmes in this respect will therefore be formulated accordingly.

Leadership training

As the transition from the women-in-development to the gender approach becomes definitive, so is the recognition that the fight for gender equality requires not just good will and commitment but also a variety of analytical, planning and implementation skills in all the 12 critical areas of concern. Our NGO leaders, advocates and politicians therefore need to be well equipped with the capacity to identify the gender issues in the different political issues, policies and programmes and to insist convincingly on how they should be taken into consideration for the benefit of both women and men. In the next five years, therefore, ACW will embark on a programme to promote the empowerment of women by training women members of parliament and women leaders of NGOs in leadership from a gender perspective.

Supporting information, communication and networking

Successful gender-mainstreaming is dependent on the quality and quantity of information that is available for use at all levels of development activities. Unfortunately, this is an area that has presented an acute problem not only because of absence of updated data and information but also because of absence of adequate linkages and networking among potential users.

In the next five years, ACW in this respect intends to support communication, outreach, information and experience sharing and networking. This will be achieved through the formulation and consolidation of the information and communication programme at ECA both at the regional and subregional levels through the SRDCs. It will partially entail the expansion of

the data base on National Focal Points in the government national machineries on the advancement of women already established to include NGOs according to well defined identification and classification methodology. It will also include a series of recurrent publications such as the country statistical brochures that will be regularly updated, the African Women Report that will be based on the statistics in the brochures, and a regular newsletter to be known as GenderNet.

The communication and networking aspects will also be developed with a view to promoting partnerships and cooperation among governments, the civil society, the private sector as well as interagency cooperation on issues related to the advancement of women.

Capacity building of ECA's African Centre for Women (ACW)

In the context of the new strategic directions of ECA where gender has been defined as a cross-cutting issue that must be integrated by all Divisions, and the recommendation of gender mainstreaming as the strategy for implementing the Platforms for Action, new and far reaching responsibilities have fallen upon ACW as the gender focal point structure of ECA and the only intergovernmental regional structure with the mandate to monitor the status of women on a continuous basis. It therefore became necessary for ACW to re-examine both its status and capacity in the light of this new situation with a view to ensuring that it could play its expanded role.

Within the framework of the restructuring exercise, steps were taken to strengthen the capacity of ACW. While the Centre has always been placed under the Cabinet it was physically moved to the same floor as the Cabinet in 1997 in order to facilitate communication and rapid consultations. Similar to other Divisions, it was also to have a full Director as its manager. There was a short time lag, however, before the anomaly of the status of the structure of ACW was elevated to the level of a Division in conformity with the level of its new responsibilities and the status of its new Director. By January 1999, following the approval of ECOSOC, ACW attained the full status of a Division while its professional staff was also increased from 4 to 12. Most of the new posts, 7 to be exact, are still vacant. They should be filled in the course of next year. In so doing, it will be necessary for ACW to search for a skills-mix that will strengthen its capacity to play its expanded role of supporting gender mainstreaming in all the 12 critical areas of concern. It will therefore have to strengthen its analytical capacity to identify and integrate gender concerns in the policies, plans and programmes of the different sectors as it fills the new posts.

The capacity of ACW will be enhanced also through improved networking that will be achieved within the framework of the information, communication and networking programme. The communication linkages that will be established between ACW and the member States, the NGOs and other partners will facilitate more effective gathering and exchange of information as well as communication for collaboration purposes.

VI. CONCLUSION

The outcome of the Sixth African Regional Conference on Women will have diverse benefits for its participants and those they represent. For us at the ECA African Centre for Women, the assessment of the current status of women based on the performance of the implementation process in the 12 critical areas of concern will facilitate more targeted and impact-oriented action. Indeed it should also lead to the promulgation and implementation of new gender-responsive policies and programmes on the part of the Member States.

It is also our ardent hope that, following this Conference, Ministries in charge of the advancement of women will organize national meetings to which they will invite all the other sectoral ministries and civil society organizations to disseminate the outcome of this Conference. More importantly, it is our hope that these national meetings will be used to prepare and mobilize the sectoral ministries and sectoral NGOs to play their role in the implementation of the Platforms for Action.

Finally, on the part of the civil society, we hope that those represented here, the parliamentarians, the NGOs, the youth, the media etc will go back and organize mechanisms whereby various actors will be held accountable to the intended beneficiaries. The Platforms for Action are clear about the actions to be undertaken to accelerate the advancement of women. Commitments to these actions were made in Dakar, Beijing and elsewhere. Being accountable therefore should be part of the process.